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ABSTRACT

This paper uses Edward T. Hall's theory of Primary Message Systems (PMS) as a basis for suggesting ways in which multicultural education can be organized around a learner's everyday life. It is argued that typical multicultural education programs do not take into account the variety and complexity of a learner's everyday life at home, in the school and in the community. Suggestions are presented within the context of the PMS theory and focus on the teacher's role in developing questions and activities that address the home, school and street subcultures of the learner. Emphasis is placed on the active participation of learners in research and discussion. Additional readings are suggested for the educator who might wish to develop this type of multicultural education approach in his or her classroom. (EB)

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A LEARNER-CENTERED APPROACH TO MULTI-CULTURAL EDUCATION:

SOME BEGINNINGS

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A Learner-Centered Approach to Multi-Cultural Education:

Some Beginnings

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Most approaches to multi-cultural education (MCE) deal with the virtues of traditional culture, emphasizing such factors as heroes, achievements, music, and food. While these all have their place, taken as a single program they impose a simplistic notion of culture on learners and teachers. Such a conception is sterile when compared with the richness and vitality of the social class and cultural values interacting in the everyday life of a single learner. The variety and complexity of a learner's life at home, in school, and in the community suggest the limitations of typical MCE programs.

Any MCE program based on traditional culture is likely to be remote from the life of a learner. In fact, the learner may find that his life does not fit any culture taught at school or home. The added impact of social class values intensifies the learner's marginality by introducing another dimension of complexity left unaccounted for in most MCE programs. Any serious MCE program must take into account the entire complex of social class and cultural values in the multiple contexts of a learner's everyday life.

The most feasible way of dealing with such complexity is to base an MCE program on the learner's everyday life. Such a program would aim at developing appreciation, acceptance, and understanding of one's own life and those of fellow leaners. Learning to value and approve oneself and others promotes cross-cultural (hereafter understood to include

social class) communication and understanding. Furthermore, the inclusion of a learner's everyday life as part of the curriculum validates the individual and his unique mix of culture and class.

Learners in such a program gain the skill to analyze and understand their own lives. They learn to appreciate the similarities and differences between their own and other cultures. The teacher's task in such a program is to develop appropriate frameworks or areas of inquiry within which learners can gather information and make comparisons. The plan of this paper is to sketch out ways, with examples, of how such a program of MCE can be organized. The conceptual framework of the program is broad, so any teacher will have great latitude to individualize the program to cultures and social classes represented in the classroom. The teacher will also undertake a considerable obligation to develop reasonable lines and methods of inquiry. The basis of this approach is Edward T. Hall's conceptualization of culture in his minor classic, *The Silent Language.*

Hall conceives of culture as a set of overlapping message systems. These primary message systems (PMS) communicate culture through the way people live their lives. One example of a PMS is the handshake. Both Anglo and Black handshakes are a form of interaction, but each expresses a unique culture. The PMS are a way to analyze how each of us communicates culture to the world. They are complex because they are inclusive and interact in significant ways, yet they are much narrower and more precise than the embracing idea of culture. The PMS offer a useful frame of reference for the teacher to generate appropriate questions and lines of inquiry for learners. The following charge provides some detail about each PMS, as well as a few additional suggestions.

More detailed discussion can be found from chapter three onward in *The Silent Language*, from which this discussion draws heavily.

E.T. HALL'S PRIMARY MESSAGE SYSTEMS (PMS)

PMS	Discussion
Interaction	Interaction deals with language generally. It includes special language such as slang, speech patterns, tone of voice, tonal patterns, abstract and expressive language, etc. One useful way to deal with language is to assemble a dictionary of usage and slang in a given class or school.
Association	Association deals with the ways in which people organize their groups and group relations. This includes nuclear and extended family organization, kinship systems, peer groups, friendships, play groups, classroom grouping, sibling relations, etc.
Subsistence	Subsistence covers two important areas: eating and work. Eating includes diet, behavior at meals (Is discussion of bodily functions at dinner taboo?), how people eat, what they eat (Some food is reinvented in different cultures, e.g., bread. Won ton, ravioli, and kreplach are all variations on the same theme.), the rules and utensils associated with eating, etc. Work includes the prestige associated with different types of jobs, education and apprenticeship systems, attitudes toward work, and even the ideal components of a job.
Bisexuality	This unfortunately named PMS deals with sex roles, various conceptions of masculinity and femininity, machismo, etc. It focuses on a universal division and can be explored at any level from clothing to dating behavior.
Territoriality	This PMS deals with proxemics, the way people use space. Latino cultures prefer personal interaction with people less than 10" apart; Americans like 14-22" distance and complain of aggressive behavior from those who stand closer. Latinos often think Americans cold and aloof because of our

preferred distance. Similarly, we organize our streets and work on a grid system (rectangles) while the French organize around a star pattern. Personal space and boundary setting are interesting areas which can be explored with learners of any age.

Temporality Time is a factor which is handled differently by various cultures and within a single culture. Rural persons have a more casual attitude toward time than clock-watching urbanites. Many cultures have a far different work day and school day from ours. Learners of all ages must learn to cope with time.

Learning Learning styles vary by culture and perhaps even by social class. Some students learn better visually and others by listening. There is a body of educational research on learning styles that can help each teacher and learner improve education and find out something about oneself.

Play Play is a marvelous area for comparison. It includes humor, organizing play, and cultural preferences for various sports. For example, some cultures show marked preferences for individual over team sports, or competitive over noncompetitive sports (like frisbee or bike riding), active over passive play (participating rather than watching TV), or violent over nonviolent sports.

Defense Defense is a broad category embracing protection of the self to protecting one's view of the world. It ranges from religion to medicine to law enforcement (or other forms of cultural enforcement such as conventions or taboos). Medicine is one example which varies greatly from culture to culture. Mexican folk medicine is different from Chinese preventive medicine or American curative medicine.

Exploitation Exploitation involves the use of materials to adapt to an environment. This can relate to work, play, or just adapting to new environments like a new neighborhood. It can also involve setting up personal space like a bedroom or decorating a house, etc.

Suggestions

The purpose of using the PMS as a starting point is to raise basic questions about how a learner's life is lived. The teacher can develop reflective thinking and insights in a student by preparing the learner to compare and contrast aspects of various cultures. One suggestion to enhance reflection and insight is to have learners consider authority relationships in their investigations. Examples of such relationships include parent-child, teacher-learner, sibling, male-female, and friendships. An important component of studying authority is to examine prestige (or personal power) in these relations. Pecking orders based on age, size, or other factors are readily recognized by learners of all ages. These inquiries into the cultures present in any classroom place a heavy burden on the teacher.

The teacher's role is to set off and area of inquiry by developing probing questions that the students may ask of themselves and each other. The teacher is obliged to develop questions and behave in a nonjudgmental fashion if cultures are to be genuinely investigated. A simple example dealing with friendship (the PMS of Association) will show the value of a nonjudgmental approach. Judgmental questions might include these: Do some cultures treat friends better than others? Do children of some cultures make friends more easily than children of other cultures? A nonjudgmental approach would ask questions such as: Do you treat friends differently than other people? How? What do you like best about friends? The focus is on examining friendship rather than competing one culture against another. Nonjudgmental questions can bring new insights into everyday life as well as new appreciation of cultures. One other framework must be added to the PMS to construct a genuine experience-based MCE program.

The second framework deals with the main subcultures common to the everyday lives of learners. These three subcultures may be labeled HOME, SCHOOL, & STREET. The HOME refers to the learner's home culture, of course. The family is the basic unit of cultural transmission, i.e., the source of each learner's cultural roots. Everything normally thought of in the concept of culture is expressed in HOME. The learner's first experiences outside of HOME (which includes the extended family) occurs in the community, or STREET.

STREET culture includes both the home cultures of peers and the developing subculture of the peer group. The significance of STREET is less for young children than older ones. By junior high age, STREET is the dominant culture in the learner's life. Peer cultures vary greatly, but each includes some adaptation of HOME to peer life, including problem areas such as dating, group or gang formation, and future orientation toward work. This is especially true where HOME is not the dominant culture in society.

SCHOOL is the common culture all learners share as a new experience. It is most familiar to those whose HOME is the dominant culture (and middle class), but as Erving Goffman has noted, school is every child's introduction to reality. As such it constitutes a separate cultural entity in the learner's experience. The SCHOOL's approach to various PMS differs clearly from those of HOME and STREET. Young learners might profitably study the school exclusively as an introduction to culture. For example, first graders might interview school personnel about all school words they don't understand, like suspension, principal, etc., and their jobs. Then they might compare authority relations with those of the family. Taken together, the combination of HOME, SCHOOL, & STREET and the PMS can be organized into the following matrix.

	Interaction	Association	Play	Subsistence	Bisexuality	etc.
HOME	x	x	x	x	x	x
SCHOOL	x	x	x	x	x	x
STREET	x	x	x	x	x	x

As the matrix suggests, there are many ways to generate a program of MCE. The variety is almost infinite and can be tailored by the teacher to meet the needs and interests of any set of students. For example, a single PMS may be compared across several HOME cultures or in the three cultures of a single learner. An example of the former would be a comparison of interaction within the families of learners with different HOME cultures. The latter case might be covered by an examination of how the use of time differs between HOME, SCHOOL, & STREET. The following paragraphs provide a more elaborate illustration.

The following examples were developed by Mary Ellen Daly, a graduate student at the University of the Pacific. They were developed for group discussion and raise a number of questions. The first example deals the PMS of Temporality in HOME, SCHOOL, & STREET.

Temporality

SCHOOL: What does the use of tardy slips say about the school's use of time?
How do schedules affect your behavior at school?
Why does the school run on strict schedules?
Do you have problems running on the school's schedule? What?

HOME: When is being late a problem in your home?
Do you have a regular meal schedule? Is it flexible?
Do you follow any sort of schedule at home every week day? On weekends?
What happens if you change your schedule at home?

STREET: Do you specify meeting times with your friends?
What happens if you are late or don't show up?
What activities do you plan on a regular basis?
How flexible is the schedule for these activities?

Territoriality

HOME: What areas of your home are most comfortable to you?
Are there any areas you feel are your own? Which? Why?
Would it bother you if the furniture were rearranged?
Would your family mind if you wanted to change it? Why?
Do you have a regular seating arrangement at the dinner table? In the living room?

SCHOOL: How do you feel about a mandatory seating arrangement in class?
Where do you like to sit in a classroom? Why?
What does a permanent seating arrangement suggest to you about the classroom?
In what school room do you feel most comfortable? Why?
How close to the teacher do you like to be when you ask a question? When you're studying? Talking?
Do you feel comfortable when the teacher stands close to you? Why?

STREET: Where do you most like to hang out with your friends?
What is it about these places that attracts you?
How close do you stand when talking to your best friend? An acquaintance? A stranger? Why?
How close is "too close"?

These examples illustrate some questions which can be used to compare cultural characteristics in group discussion. Other techniques may be employed profitably; some of these follow.

In general, MCE demands the active participation of learners in research and discussion. The following list is hardly exhaustive, but it is oriented toward active participation.

1. language experience
2. role playing
3. various communications games
4. committee work
5. group discussion
6. interviewing (live, on tape, or with note taking)
7. library research
8. the ever popular OTHER

These suggestions are but a simple beginning to tailor a solid MCE program. Whatever its final form, the aims of MCE remain the same: to develop an appreciation, acceptance, and understanding of one's own and other cultures.

Some Sources for Further Reading

Canfield & Wells, *100 Ways to Enhance Self-Concept in the Classroom*
This is the single best book on communications games and ideas for teachers and parents. It can be adapted to any MCE program or used on its own. It should be in every teacher's professional library.

Castillo, Gloria, *Left Handed Teaching*, 2nd ed.

Almost as good, but organized quite differently, this book is also a must for your professional library.

Goffman, Erving, *Stigma*

This sociology classic offers great insight into the behavior of individuals with low self-esteem and how 'normals' treat them. It's worth studying for this and its analysis of subcultures.

Hall, Edward T., *The Hidden Dimension*

Hall examines how cultural patterns, especially those of territoriality and other spatial relations, shape the world constructed by our culture. This book expands greatly on some PMS first introduced in his other work.

_____, *The Silent Language*

Hall's development of the PMS occurs in this book. It sometimes gets technical and theoretical, but his examples are wonderful. It's well worth your time to read and think about.

Somers, R. *Personal Space*

There are a number of books covering this topic, but Somers' research is worth looking at.

I haven't done any justice to the field of anthropology, but there are many fine works which can expand your knowledge and inspire even better MCE programs.

The Last Word

I am interested in developing this paper and approach to MCE a lot further, so I welcome any comments or criticism. Furthermore, if you want to try this approach and teach in or near Stockton, I'd like to hear of your experiences and perhaps even help out if I have the time.